

Ecclesiastes- Chapter 7 Part 4

If you haven't taken the time already to do so let's turn in our Bibles over to the seventh chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes. Feels like we have been flying through this book, but not so much this chapter. This is our third week in this chapter. It is the longest we have spent in any chapter so far in this book and not what I had planned, but my plans are often wrong when I think about how much of a text we are going to look at each time.

Most of this book as we have seen has been very narrative in nature. Solomon introduces one by one us to those that are living under the sun. That is apart from God. Shows us how life under the sun has no real lasting meaning. Shows us everything goes away in the end.

Solomon's best advice is for those living apart from God is to enjoy what you have while you have it and hope you have a friend to share it with. Kind of the message of eat, drink, and be happy for tomorrow we die. And again, that's his message to those that have no hope in God. That have no desire to live pleasing before the Lord. And it's his message for good reason because when those that live in that state come to the end of their days, they will die with no hope of salvation. When they die there is nothing good to come in the life to come, so enjoy now what you have while you can.

Overall, that has been the message that Solomon has been showing us. Showing us the futility of that kind of existence and he's done so by showing examples of things that only provide temporary satisfaction. Solomon has been doing this for a reason. He has been doing so to get us to the end of the book and learn the lesson it is better to live your life now serving God and enjoying the blessings that he has provided. For in the end, our service and the treasures that we have laid up in heaven are the only things with real value.

So, those are the kinds of things we have been looking at until we came to chapter 7. Chapter 7 though has been very different for us. Chapter 7 is a collection of proverbs. They might be one verse or a few verses long, but we have here a collection of proverbs and all of these proverbs have to do with living a good life now before God our King.

So far, we have made it down to verse 15. We are looking to finish this chapter today, so let's read our verses today and then come back and make application.

Ecc 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

Ecc 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Ecc 7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

Ecc 7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

Ecc 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Ecc 7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

Ecc 7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Ecc 7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

Ecc 7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

Ecc 7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

Ecc 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Ecc 7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the

preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:

Ecc 7:28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

Ecc 7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

I think we will be able to make quick progress through the remainder of our verses today.

Let's turn our attention back to verse 16.

Ecc 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

Now as we read this verse Solomon is not condemning living a righteous life. Solomon desires for us to live a righteous life. Again, he concludes this book with the thoughts of:

Ecc 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecc 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

So, with that knowledge we know Solomon in our verse is certainly not telling us *not* to worry about living a righteous life because as I just read, Solomon tells us ultimately every secret thing good or evil will be judged.

Consider the implications of that statement. That means every sin you thought you got away with. Every little thing you did when you thought no one was looking. Every little thing-good or evil- out of the sight of man was still seen by an all-knowing all-seeing God and every deed good or bad is being recorded in heaven. Every jot and every tittle. Folks that ought to be a sobering thought right there. There is no escaping the eyes of God.

Likewise, our verse here is also not condemning wisdom. If it is one thing that Solomon has exhorted in this book it is wisdom. Just a quick glance down this chapter reveals several times that Solomon has lifted-up wisdom over the way of fools. Lifted-up wisdom over riches. He is going to continue to lift-up wisdom in the verses to come. Solomon in no way shape or form in verse 16 is telling us that wisdom is a bad thing because it isn't.

So then if the pursuit of righteousness is a good thing and pursuit of wisdom is a good thing, what then is Solomon speaking of here when he seems to be speaking negatively about both?

Well, notice the phrases with me again. Consider first righteousness. Scripture here says, "Be not righteous over much". Today we would say, "Do not be overly righteous". If you are carrying a NKJV then you will see that is how it is translated. The NASB says, "Do not be excessively righteous". Keep that in your minds for a minute or two as we look to the next phrase.

What does it say here about wisdom. Notice again the phrases, "neither make thyself over wise". Here again the NKJV says "Nor be overly wise." The NASB again reads, "do not be overly wise".

Maybe that helped and maybe it didn't. But the dynamic thought Solomon is getting at in the simplest of all layman's terms for us today is don't be a self-righteous know it all. Is that clear enough?

Any of you all ever meet anyone like that? I imagine you have. Seems as if I run into them all the time and unfortunately many of them are pastoring flocks of their own, but aren't content worrying about their own flock, they want to correct everyone else. That said, it isn't just pastors that become self-righteous know it all's. They can be anyone, but whomever they might

be, these are people who want to tell you everything in life you are doing wrong or what you need to improve on.

Seems like no matter where you go in religious circles, there is always someone out there that wants to tell you how you need to dress. How you should be cutting your hair. How you should raise your children. They've got it all figured out and if you aren't doing it their way then you're wrong. You've met these people, right? God help us not to be these people.

These self-righteous know it all's seem to walk around with their religious noses in the air as if to let everyone else know that they are a notch below them. They're the greatest in the kingdom and they know it.

They think they've got it all figured out from Genesis to Revelation and are in need of nothing, but they don't know that before God they are "*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked*". They are in many ways just like that of what the Pharisees became. Men who knew it all and wanted to show their righteousness to the world by blowing trumpets with their giving and wearing garments that made them look as if they were the most religious people around.

Can you all think of one time that Jesus praised the lifestyle of the Pharisees? I can't. There are times that he spoke of some good things they believed maybe in comparison to the Sadducees especially, but as far as their practices went, he told us not to be like them.

Again, brothers and sisters, we are called to live a life of righteousness. Not just here in this book, but throughout the word of God. Paul exhorts us to....

2Ti 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness

We are also exhorted to seek wisdom as we have seen Solomon tell us and again not just here in Ecclesiastes. We see that exhortation to seek wisdom in the New Testament as well.

Jas 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

The Lord wants us to live righteously. The Lord wants us to be wise, but the Lord doesn't want us to be so righteous and so wise that we are good for nothing.

What do I mean by that? I mean that some people act like their so up there they don't even want to be seen with one who is rampantly living their life under the sun. They don't go out of their way to share the word with them. On those occasions that they do they hold themselves to be so self-righteous themselves that no one in their sins is going to listen. They have become good for nothing in building up the kingdom and they take their place just as the Pharisees appalled that Jesus was a friend to sinners.

You know how else they have become no good? They don't even see the depths of their own sins daily. They become like the Pharisee talking about all that they do for God, but yet, leave his house without being justified.

That's should be some sobering thoughts right there. Thankfully, I don't see that as a problem with you here at Grace. You seem to be a bunch that understands we're just miserable sinners in need of grace and no one is better than another. God help us to remain that way.

Now let's read on here in Ecclesiastes. Our next verse is like a bookend to our verse we have just looked at.

Ecc 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Solomon now takes us to the other end of the spectrum. He has just shown us those that are so religious they are useless now lest people read the last verse out of context and say see it is better to do wicked, Solomon now gives us this verse.

Now I hope you realize from the start in this verse that Solomon is not giving his approval for being *just a little bad*. The fact is that Solomon is getting ready to lay out for us that man is bad enough in his natural state.

What Solomon is saying is that we should not pursue greater wickedness than what we already do. We should not seek out getting involved in foolish endeavors that could lead to a short life.

Can wickedness lead us to a shorter life? How many people in our own area have foolishly overdosed because of becoming addicted to the wickedness of heroin? How many young men and women have died because they foolishly aligned themselves with the wickedness of gangs?

Let's just face it, some sins consume man even to death and yet some men chase after it. It is a sad situation to see and we have all seen it.

So, to recap to so far Solomon has told us not to be so righteous we can't see our own sins and now he tells us not to become so wicked that our sins bring us to an end even faster.

Let's read on. Solomon is not done with these thoughts.

Ecc 7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

Again, our verse here is not independent from the last two verses, but rather draws from them. When Solomon says, "it is good that thou

shouldest take hold of this". He again is talking about the last two verses.

When the verse says, "also from this withdraw not thine hand," he is saying that it is good that we should not find ourselves grasping either extreme of living- a self-righteous know it all or a wicked fool.

Our last phrase means that a man who fears God will listen to this advice. Truly a person who trusts after God should not just heed the words of Solomon here, but a wise man in the Lord will seek to listen to every word in these 66 books we call the Bible. Every word is written for our betterment in this life or in preparation for the life to come. We would all be wise to know what it says.

Let's continue on.

Ecc 7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

We have with this verse now broken with the thought of the last three. This is another proverb and certainly one that we have seen echoed in various forms in this book already. This is of course another verse that is pushing for people to seek after wisdom more than strength.

You know when you look at the word of God you will find that David fought a lot of battles all the time in unifying Israel and protecting it. We find also in the word of God, that under Solomon Israel thrived like it never had before and never did after. You know what you don't see in the reign of Solomon? Military battles. It's not to say that they never had to protect themselves and fight. We don't have the entire history of Israel here, but what I'm trying to say is that Solomon brought Israel to its height not through the greatest army Israel ever knew, but through his wisdom.

One who is wise makes wise decisions as opposed to strong men who leap into a fight.

Let's read on.

Ecc 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Again, we have another proverb, not necessarily attached to the last verse, but certainly is a truth that we mentioned just a moment ago in verse 17 and that is man doesn't have to try to be wicked. He already is. No man on this earth lives a life without sin. That being said, when I say that we understand that there was one man who lived without sin and that was the God man Jesus Christ.

Consider why he came though. He who had no sin came so that we who do sin- which was everyone else- might have a hope of salvation. Our verse here is not saying that nothing man does is good, but rather it is saying that there is no man who only does good. All men sin and come short of the glory of God.

Paul echoed this same thought in the New Testament, didn't he?

Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

Paul of course in that chapter goes on to show the wickedness of man from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

Here's the thing we all tend to think that we are good people, but even on the best of our days there is none righteous, no not one. Including the overly righteous in verse 16 that is swelled up with pride because they think they have everything right.

Now I suppose that we could go off on a tangent this morning and look at what the Bible says of the doctrine of total depravity, but I don't think that would be in our best interest now. Solomon moves on to the next thought and I think we need to do that as well.

Now these next couple of verse are just good pieces of practical advice for anyone.

Look here.

Ecc 7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

You know some people want to know everything that people say about them all the time, but Solomon here says it is a dangerous thing. I remember when I first started working at the age of 16, I really started noticing how people in the workplace talk.

When one person was gone, the other employees would talk about what they were doing wrong at work and at life. Sometimes I got the feeling well they really don't like that other person.

Then two days later when that person was back and another person was gone, guess what happened? They talked about the person that was gone like they were the worst person around.

Wasn't very long before I realized the only way to not be the next person on the gossip list was to always be there because I knew when I was gone, I would be the next on the list and I'm sure I was more than once.

Of course the one constant was is they always talked bad about the boss. I learned a lesson for sure back then.

Sometime last year, I finally put up video cameras at work. They are great for seeing who's at work and who isn't, great for seeing when patients arrive, but besides video they also record sound. You can hear every conversation going on if you wanted too. Nonetheless, I have endeavored to never listen to what is being said because odds are that even though I am an

awesome boss I might here some things that I don't want to hear about me.

Solomon says it isn't wise to want to know what your workers are saying about you all the time. It's not wise to want to know what your coworkers are saying all the time. It is not wise to want to know what people at school are saying all the time because you might hear some things you don't want to hear and then what do we get? We get angry, don't we? Angry they would say those things about us behind our back.

Solomon is really just telling us we need to not worry about what others say when we aren't around and next, he tells us why we need to not worry about it so much.

Ecc 7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Solomon says we need not to worry and get angry about the fact that people speak bad about us sometimes because we ourselves have done the same thing.

Sometimes we slam their character, work ethic, morality. All kinds of things and if that other person were to know what you said, they might not want anything to do with you anymore. They would probably be angry at you too.

Here is the thing though. Even though you might say something negative about a person, deep down you might genuinely care for the other person even though your speech was rough against them at times. Sometimes the ones we say the most about are the ones we care about the most because we expect a lot out of them.

So in summery, in these two verses Solomon says not to be nosy about what everyone is saying even if it is about you because you know you have done the same thing. Pretty wise advice, I think.

Let's move on.

Ecc 7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

What is the "all this" that Solomon is speaking of? It is these proverbs that we have been looking at in this chapter. These simple truths for better living before God. Solomon has observed and proved these thoughts by his wisdom.

That's the first part of this verse. The second part of this verse though Solomon talks about his desire to be even more wise. To seek out more knowledge that he didn't have already. The problem is somethings he wanted to know was far from him. That is, he couldn't know all that he desired.

So, he then says.

Ecc 7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

There are somethings even the one who desires to know the answers too cannot know. There are a lot of things that scientists are trying to actively figure out that in the end even with all the modern equipment that we have cannot know.

There are things about God that even those seeking wisdom may never know on this side of heaven. Scripture teaches us the secret things belongs to the Lord. He chooses who to reveal those things too and whom not too.

So, Solomon says seeking after wisdom is good, but there are some things that we just may not ever have the answer for in this life.

Let's keep reading.

Ecc 7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason

of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

This verse ought to sound a little familiar to us. Solomon started in chapter one echoing these same thoughts.

Ecc 1:17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

And in chapter 2.

Ecc 2:12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly:

What we are reading in this book is the result of Solomon's seeking out wisdom and to understand now in chapter 7 not just folly, but rather the wickedness of folly.

Now once again the subject changes in these next few verses. It shouldn't take us too much longer to look at them.

Ecc 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

If we were to go back and look at the wisdom of Solomon recorded for us in the book of Proverbs, we would find there many warnings about the kind of woman we see here in this verse.

Solomon the man with many wives knew that one of the easiest ways for man to fall was to fall to the enticement of a woman. Solomon said he found it better to die than to seek after the one who would snare the heart.

You have probably all seen a young man or in reverse a young lady in your life who grew up right knew what was right and wrong and then fall for the wrong person she or he took them

away from church, friends, family. Life just became a downward spiral for them.

And it all started because one was seeking to fulfill a desire of the flesh more than seeking to fulfill the desires of God. The one who is seeking righteousness first though will not be enticed by the words of such a person.

Let's read the next two verses together,

Ecc 7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:

Ecc 7:28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. Solomon says in verse 27 this next thing that he says he found by counting one by one.

Verse 28 speaks of uprightness. Now Solomon has already told us that no man is perfect and doesn't sin. So, he can't be talking about a sinless state here in these verses.

Rather he seems to be implying that as he observed men and women finding one that is truly upright is hard thing to find.

Think of how God looked down on the earth in the days before the flood and found Noah upright in his generation. Was Noah sinless? No, but he was striving with all his heart to do what is right all the time.

Most of us here this morning are striving to do right. Are we doing it all the time? Probably not. That is the kind of person Solomon is speaking of here.

We know of course as well there has only been one man that has ever lived that was completely upright and that man was Jesus Christ. He alone is perfect in every generation and my prayer is that you know him this morning.

One last verse and we will finish.

Ecc 7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

This verse speaks about the nature of man at the time of creation. God made man in his own

image. Made him upright. Made him holy. Man in the garden fell from the state that man made him in and man has continued since that time to fall to one sin after another.

Again, today I remind you that the only remedy that we have for that sin is Christ.